

HOTEL OF THE WEEK



City retreat: Although it is located just steps from one of the busiest intersections in Toronto, a luxurious calm surrounds the Windsor Arms

Gentility returns to Toronto

WINDSOR ARMS HOTEL

The little hotel that attracts a whole lot of glitter and glam

BY CHRISTOPHER HEARD

Without the brouhaha that surrounds the opening of most major hotels, Toronto's Windsor Arms quietly re-opened in 1999 as an intimate, luxury hotel situated at the base of a towering condominium. In the Bloor-Bay area, steps from the most expensive shopping district in the country, the hotel has quickly become a happening spot for celebrities and movie stars passing through the city or staying for an extended period.

Built in 1927 by architect Kirk Hysop, the Neo-Gothic apartment hotel became a Toronto landmark. In its heyday, from the late 1950s to the mid-'70s, it was the place to see and be seen. Actors from Vincent Price to Katherine Hepburn and Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton (who kept a year-round suite), called the Windsor Arms their home-away-from-home. Queen Elizabeth II also stayed at the hotel during royal visits in the 1950s and '60s.

In the '80s the hotel started to fade in the shadows of the larger luxury hotels located within a few blocks, such as the Four Seasons in Yorkville. By 1991, its glory days were long gone and the Windsor Arms closed its doors.

Those who refused to believe the Windsor Arms was really gone were rewarded eight years later when the hotel was redesigned, reconceptualized and reopened by a new owner, George Friedmann.



Rooms are spacious and decorated with 1920s-inspired furniture

It is not surprising the hotel ranks among the top in the city for celebrities: The suites at the Windsor Arms are among the most expensive in Toronto.

The 21 luxury suites and seven oversized rooms (ranging from 500 to 1,500 square feet) are conservatively decorated in monochromatic colours and are sparsely, but comfortably, furnished with 1920s-inspired mahogany and birch furniture. Several guestrooms have fireplaces (including the largest, the Windsor Suite, which also features a fireplace in the bathroom) and large

THE STAFF-TO-GUEST RATIO OF 6:1 ENSURES EACH GUEST RECEIVES SPECIAL ATTENTION

bathrooms with limestone floors and walls. The bedrooms are spacious and the huge, comfortable beds are adorned with Frette linens.

When strolling into the Windsor Arms, it is as though you have walked into the foyer of a stately

manor house. The calm, confined lobby opens into the spacious Courtyard Café—an elegant restaurant with high ceilings and skylights.

The smallness of the hotel ensures each guest receives special attention. While the hotel has a staff-to-guest ratio of 6:1 (the highest in the country), you do not even know they are there. Guests are left alone until a request is made, which is fulfilled instantaneously.

Guest requests have ranged from a bathtub being filled with strawberry JELL-O, to stocking a room with imported liquors, to

Mr. Friedmann himself accompanying a member of a well-known boy band on a shopping trip to buy a new suit.

Suites feature butler cupboards that open on to the hallway to allow for room service delivery—without

disturbing guests. Requested items are placed in a closet from the hallway and an indicator light is turned on inside the suite to tell guests that their delivery has arrived.

Guests can also take advantage of a butler service and 24-hour concierge service. And, if they should need a car for a shopping trip or to arrive at an event in style, the Bentley is at their service.

Although the hotel is situated a few steps from two of the busiest, noisiest streets in Toronto—Bay and Bloor Streets—a genteel quiet and calm surrounds it.

Checking into the Windsor Arms produces an almost instantaneous sadness—there is the realization that you have to leave eventually. But until that time, the Windsor Arms is a comfortable, lavish, home-away-from-home.

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IF YOU GO

- The Windsor Arms hotel is located at 18 St. Thomas St., Toronto, Ont., M5S 3E7. Call: 416-971-9666 or visit the Web site at www.windsrarmshotel.com
- The hotel features the Courtyard Café restaurant; Club 22, a cigar lounge and stand up bar; and the Tea Room, a Champagne and caviar lounge.
- The Darphin Spa, located on the fourth and fifth floors opposite the swimming pool and gym, offers beauty treatments by staff trained in Paris.
- Room rates range from \$295 to \$2,000 a night.